



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

ON THE COMPARISON OF GRADING SYSTEMS IN HIGH SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES¹

CHARLES HUBBARD JUDD

Director of the School of Education, The University of Chicago

The plan which it is the purpose of this paper to suggest to the Association is, I believe, a natural development of the work which the Association has been doing from its foundation. We have passed through a number of different systems of college admission in this country, and little by little we have been achieving a more intimate relation between the high schools and the colleges. Under the oldest system of examination, known by experience to many of us, there was not even an association of institutions. The single college set up its standards of admission, and all comers were required to submit to the direct test of the college before being admitted to classes. This simple examination method naturally worked itself up to a combination of colleges. There was economy in combined examinations, and greater fairness in uniform examinations. We have still existing in this country one example at least of an elaborate combination on the examination basis. I refer, of course, to the Middle States and Maryland Board of Examiners. This type of combination for the conduct of examinations has the inherent weakness that the examination method itself is distinctly unsatisfactory, and it does little to promote an intimate relation between colleges and high schools. If we need any evidence that the examination plan is defective, we have this evidence in the recent action of the institution which has been the recognized leader in the Middle States and Maryland Examination Board.

Columbia University recently appointed an administrative officer whose function it is to reopen the question of admission in the case of every candidate who is presented on the basis

¹Read at the meeting of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, Chicago, March, 1910.

of the examinations conducted by the Middle States and Maryland Board. This Columbia officer collects, in addition to the results of the examination, information regarding the high-school work of the candidate and an account of his personal characteristics. If the high-school work of the candidate does not agree in character with the results of the examination, the Columbia admission officer is competent to neglect the results of the examination. He may finally decide that a personal interview with the candidate is necessary, and may require such a personal interview before admitting the student to the university. There is, I repeat, in this radical change in the method of admitting students to Columbia, clear evidence that admission by examinations, which has heretofore been the accepted mode of admission in that institution, is recognized as requiring radical modifications.

There can be no doubt that there are very great advantages in the more comprehensive forms of organization which promote intimate contact between the high schools and the colleges. There are two general systems by which contact between colleges and high schools has been cultivated. One of these has its best expression in the union of some of the smaller New England colleges. I dare say all of you are familiar with the certification system of this group of colleges. They grant for a brief term to high-school principles the right to certificate students to the colleges included in the association. If the students who come from an accepted high school are not successful in their college work the right of certification is withdrawn from the principal of that school. This system operates very well, and keeps the principals constantly alive to their obligation of seeing that poor students are not offered for admission. The relationship under this system is, however, not sufficiently comprehensive to make it possible for the colleges and the high schools to develop together. A high school is criticized chiefly when its students fail, and especially when they fail signally. There is no constant discussion of standards in detail, and there is no adequate recognition of the cases in which no complaint can arise. Our own system of inspecting high schools has certain advantages over

the New England plan. It brings some officer of the college into intimate relation with many of the high schools. Suggestions can be offered by the inspector relating to all of the different phases of work in the high school.

Yet I believe there is ground for criticism of our system, because it does not go far enough. I shall venture to express the defects which I see in our system by calling attention to the fact that any inspectorial system is likely to be deficient because it lacks in complete objectivity of standards. An inspector goes to a school and approves it. The approval is gratifying, but what of it? Likewise the inspector comes and condemns. His criticism is just so convincing as his personality. If he has to resort to technicalities, if people do not believe that he knows as much as the principal in charge, it is extremely difficult to give objectivity to the criticism. The fact is, we need in all of our school work more standards that can be detached from anyone's say so. We need to develop our judgments of high-school work so that these matters may be put in such form that people will have confidence in our standards.

The plan which I have to suggest would support our present system by giving to inspectors the kind of evidence which they need in order to make their judgments distinctly more objective than they are at the present time.

Finally, I think we shall all agree that the current systems are one and all irritatingly deficient because they fail to develop reciprocal relations. High schools have been subjected for long generations to supervision; now they are asking with great point for the credentials of the colleges to justify the assumption of supervisory rights. There is many a good high school within easy reach of this meeting that can surpass, in facilities for educational work, in pedagogical effectiveness, and in public service, many so-called colleges. If we cannot devise a plan whereby these high schools can get from this association as much as the colleges, we shall break our rope of sand. It is a fact which we may as well face that the strong high schools care very little for our judgments now because these judgments are not full or convincing. The high schools will care less and

less, if those judgments continue to be based exclusively on opinion. Reciprocity of relation and objectivity of judgment are the ends for which I plead.

The value of our system of inspection rests upon the fact that the inspector is a medium of communication between institutions. It cannot be overlooked that commerce between these institutions is very much more vigorous through the students than it can ever be through inspectors, and if the facts now at hand regarding our students were properly utilized we should be able to estimate each other very much more accurately. A student goes to a high school, and his work and character become well known to the principal of the school. He goes to a college, and the new instructors again become acquainted with his intellectual and moral personality. Each institution makes a study of this same student. How wasteful it is that we do not compare students more completely, and thus measure ourselves by our judgments of them. It would require very little study of our respective judgments of the same student body to make us clearly aware of our likenesses and our differences. Thus, suppose it is found that the students who stand very well in the high school take the same relative position in the college to which they pass. Suppose it is found, further, that the students who are mediocre in the high school occupy a similar grade in the college, and, finally, suppose that the parallelism holds throughout, and the students who were poor in high school continue to rank at about the same level in the college. Such a complete parallelism in the standing of the students in a high school and in a college would indicate that the standards of judgment in the two institutions are practically the same. If, on the other hand, it should be found that the students from a given high school who come to college with a high-school record of good grades are immediately ranked in the middle or the lower half of the college class, and if this falling off in relative position in the class shows itself to be the regular result of transition from that high school to that particular college, there would be clear evidence in this lack of harmony that the rating of the students by the high school and by the college in question are not according to the same

standards. Please note that I am not asserting on the basis of this supposition that the college is infallible or that its rating of the high-school students is more justifiable than that of the high school. I am simply calling attention to the fact that any marked disparity in the rating of the students in a given high school and in a given college shows a lack of uniformity in the two institutions in the standards which they adopt.

I assume that the other devices which we now employ in admitting students to college are nothing more or less than efforts to ascertain, in terms of the requirements of some college, the kind of standard which has been set up in the high school. I assume that an entrance examination conducted by a college in a given high school is an effort to determine how far the students in this high school are qualified to meet the demands of the college. I assume also that the visit of the high-school inspector to a given institution is an effort to determine the standards of that high school in terms of the judgment of a given inspector. If, now, instead of depending upon these brief inspections or upon a single examination set at the end of the course, we could have from every high school and every college in this Association a clear statement of the way in which students are graded in all their courses in these institutions, we should have a valuable body of information which would show the variation among the colleges, as well as the variation among the high schools. Let me give an example which will illustrate what I mean. A principal with whom I discussed this matter made the statement that he knew institutions of college rank to which students from his high school could go with the assurance that they could take passing rank in these colleges even though they had stood very low in his high school. Here is an individual case of a principal who has a sufficient degree of acquaintance with colleges to judge something of the standard of the colleges in terms of the standard of his own high school. Why should not information with regard to the standards of colleges and universities be as accessible as our present supposed knowledge of the standards of high schools? If the colleges of this association find it necessary in the formulation of their plans

of work to become acquainted with the standards which high schools undertake to maintain, it certainly would be equally valuable and suggestive for the high schools to know what is done by the colleges.

I should not want to be understood as asserting that high schools and colleges have failed entirely to interchange convictions on the matter of standards, but I should be willing to go far in defending the statement that there has been more discussion of a vague sort than is wise and less discussion of impersonal standards than is desirable. Let me take a concrete illustration of what I mean by this statement. Many of the high schools have been stating that they could do better work if they were allowed freedom to formulate their courses of study without reference to the existing demands in colleges. Thus they tell us that they would drop some of the modern languages which they now attempt to carry, or that they would drop some of the mathematics or Latin requirements. Some of the high schools which have made such changes have been asserting very freely that the students who issue from them are fully as well qualified as the students who come from the high schools which carry out the full program of preparation required by the ordinary college. Suppose that we should get together the material which would make possible an impersonal and impartial comparison of the grade of work done by all of the different students who go to college, some of whom are qualified to meet the full requirements in languages, some of whom are not. Suppose we could trace the work of these students through their later college courses and could determine the relative ranks taken in the higher institutions by the different classes. We should then be in a position to discuss the whole matter on grounds much safer than the unsupported judgment of those who defend the assertion that these subjects are important for the proper qualification of students; we should not have to speculate with regard to the work of students prepared in accordance with different sets of entrance requirements; we should have a body of material of scientific value collected from a sufficiently wide range of institutions to justify a final conclusion.

As a matter of fact, we are forcing each other into all sorts of vague compromises just because no one has facts. Who knows regarding this particular matter of languages whether we are slavishly following traditions or fighting for a real good? Who knows whether the conservatives or the radicals are right? What is more, who can know under existing conditions? Personally, I am not in favor of all the traditions which are stoutly maintained, but I wish to say with equal emphasis that I am not in favor of adopting radical suggestions just because they are offered with persistence.

We are fortunate in having some very good examples of such scientific investigations now in hand. My good colleague, Professor Dearborn, prepared while he was at the University of Wisconsin some very striking studies of the relation of schools in the state to the university. The results of these studies are published by the University of Wisconsin in two bulletins. The first shows that with few exceptions students maintain in college the same relative rank as they made in the higher school. The second calls attention to the many variations in the grading of students which appear under different teachers and in different subjects. These studies seem to me epoch-making. Yet no single student, no single institution can work out the problem. Hence I come to this Association to suggest that this Association consider the desirability of forming a central committee which shall receive reports from all of the high schools and all of the colleges that are connected with the Association.

These reports should not be in the usual form, giving merely the percentages of students in different subjects, but should be in such a form as to indicate also where the student stands in the class in which he does his work in the institutions which report him. Thus, a boy who has left the high school with a standing of 84 per cent in Latin cannot be placed intelligently by an inspection of this percentage mark. This 84 per cent may be the equivalent of 75 per cent in another high school, or the equivalent of 94 per cent in a third institution. The mere statement that the boy is 84 in his mark does not signify very much. If, on the other hand, it could be stated of this boy that

in a class of 100 he had a standing of 84 per cent and was in a position sixteenth from the head, we should then have a fairly definite notion of what would be meant by the mark reported in his case. If now we follow this boy in his college work, and find that when he elects Latin he is able to maintain a standing in the first fifth of the class, we should have good reason to state that the standard of work in Latin in the two institutions which he attended is about the same. If, on the other hand, our candidate who stood in the first fifth of the class in the high school suddenly drops to the third or fourth fifth of the class on entering college, we should then recognize in his change in relative position the fact that the high school and college had different standards. It would require a little work on the part of the high schools and colleges to formulate their reports of students in such a way as to indicate relative position in the class, but this relative position is the only possible basis on which to make complete comparisons, and if the information could be collected for all of the institutions attended by the boys and girls in whom this Association is interested we should have an instrument of standardization the like of which has never yet been evolved. If the various institutions reporting to the central committee which I have suggested would prepare their statements with regard to students in such a way as to indicate relative position, then the central committee could very easily compile the statistics with regard to any given high school, with regard to any given college, and with regard to students of any particular class.

The plan of such a central committee as this would in no wise interfere with the intimate direct relations which are established between many institutions and the high schools affiliated with them. It is entirely proper that an institution should send its representative to a high school and should so far as possible give the encouragement to the high school and receive the benefits of patronage which result from such a visit. But I think there can be no question that all who have been involved in such relations as these will recognize the fact that the visit of an inspector very frequently fails to reveal the actual character of the relation between

a high school and a college. If the inspector is optimistic, we may have a meaningless series of compliments upon the work of the school. Even though these may be entirely justified, they would have a more general objective validity if they were based upon a complete record of the subsequent work of the students who graduated from this high school. Criticism of high schools very frequently takes at the present time the form of a more or less personal objection on the part of the inspector. With the plan which I have suggested information could be forwarded to a given high school indicating that the work in a single department or in a group of departments is not such as to qualify students for later successful work in the colleges to which these students are admitted. Again, there would be an objectivity and stability to these facts which would be very much greater than can by any means attach to the criticism of a single inspector.

Thus far I have attempted to indicate some of the obvious practical advantages of the sort of information which I have advocated that this Association collect. I wish to draw attention for a moment to the significance of such information beyond the mere help that it would give in solving the problem of admission. The institutions in this Association must begin to collect definite scientific information with regard to their own student body if we are to have that type of progress in secondary education and in college education which will justify us in saying that we have reduced our educational organization to anything like a scientific basis. We would not allow any agricultural experiment to go forward in this part of the country with as little centralized information about its results as we have regarding the results in education. We have long since seen that agriculture is a matter that concerns all the people to such an extent that any large experiment in the cultivation of any plant or animal is worthy of the attention of scientific experts, and by scientific experts we do not any longer mean isolated individuals each working upon some single problem. We have made it a matter of public concern that definite information of the success or failure of our work here be brought to us in comprehensive form. So far as the institutional interests of many of us are concerned, this scientific

aspect of the subject is of much greater importance than the mere facilitation of college entrance. Admission to college might doubtless go on for a long time in the form in which it is now organized. There are institutions that will admit anybody who applies for admission. The time has passed when anything like a high degree of intellectual attainment is required for continuation in our higher schools. The result is that practically any boy or girl who wants to go to college can secure admission somewhere. So long as this is the case it is not likely to be true that any institution will draw sharp lines of college admission or will attempt to maintain standards which exclude the mediocre student. A study of one of the large high schools of the city of Chicago in its relations to the University of Chicago shows that students go to college from every level of scholarship above the passing mark. There are some who are high and some who are low. This is merely the concrete manifestation of the well-known fact that in this age every kind of boy or girl has access to higher education. The traditional exclusiveness of the colleges is a thing of the past. Our colleges are as democratic as our social life. What is the duty of the high school to the college under such circumstances? It is certainly not to send merely the selected few who take high rank. The duty of the high school is to report accurately just where the students stands, be it high or low. It is equally the obligation of the college to report back what it has been able to do with the various students sent up by the high school. Some find themselves and improve. Some are forced out, some are forced down in the more general competition of college work. All these facts regarding college work are of the highest significance to the high schools and to the colleges themselves.

I cannot refrain from calling attention to the fact that if this Association would work out this problem it would furnish a formula which could be used by high schools in their relations to elementary schools. Any institution which takes students from any other institution could make a genuine contribution to education by comparing its different students with reference to their preparation and their achievements in the later schools.

If the arguments which have been presented for an extension of our present lines of work in this Association have in any degree secured your assent, I trust that you may find it expedient to give this comparison of grading systems a study through a committee. It would probably be over-hasty to do more than appoint a committee to prepare a detailed report on such material as may be collected during the year. Such a committee could work to great advantage under the sanction of this Association, and could then recommend a central bureau or other means of perfecting the plan in the light of fuller experience than we now have.